

Shakespeare and the Reinvention of the Court Masque

Research Thesis

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by

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The Renaissance court masque was a lavish form of dramatic entertainment containing spoken verse and music that was performed by disguised members of the court. The genre truly began to flourish during the 16th and 17th centuries under the ruling of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. At the Stuart court, the masque developed and became a new genre from its previous incarnations. At the time of James I's succession to the throne, a patent was signed with Shakespeare's company, naming James as their patron and making them the King's Men. From 1603 to 1613, the King's Men performed 138 times before James' court; previously under Elizabeth's reign, the troupe performed only 32 times in a ten year span (Botanaki 71). In the years between James' enthronement and Shakespeare's death, the company would deliver 177 of the 299 plays performed at court (Botanaki 71). Between the reigns of Elizabeth and James, Shakespeare began integrating elements of the court masque into his works, particularly *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Previously, critics have focused on individual elements, such as the use of song, speech, poetry and mythological or allegorical characters, but these merely scratch the surface. Within these two works, Shakespeare incorporates the elements of the court masque in broader and more thematic ways; as he does so, his plays reimagine its applications.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, little is seen of the masque tradition; its presence is miniscule and the work contains far less spectacle than is expected of a

masque. The text gravitates towards a more accessible style, offering more “low brow” sensibilities that make it more “popular” in terms of supporting commoners. Alternatively, *The Tempest* establishes a more traditional approach to the masque genre, opting instead to honor the monarchy and the royal spectacle.

The court masque and its audiences

A masque was typically a setting, a lyric, scenic and dramatic framework comprised of song and dance. The presence of a group of dancers was constant in the court masque and ranged from eight to sixteen performers depending on the scale and grandeur of the performance (Scheilling 93-138). As court masques were prestige displays, all of the dancers were commonly noble and titled courtiers, whose function was neither to sing nor to speak, but to evoke a kind of grandeur through their presence and elaborate costuming (Scheilling 93-138). It was expected that their finery amongst the elaborate scenery would be enhanced by the artistic styling of the professional entertainers, who delivered both vocal and instrumental performances and thus established a cohesive spectacle (Scheilling 93-138).

Within their performances, masques contained certain conventions. The first entrance of the masquers was marked by a march from their seated positions or the first dance (Scheilling 93-138). These grand entries as well as some dances were carefully crafted to highlight the guest of honor, the monarch (Botonaki 68-80). Ben

Jonson's masques often used these premeditated displays of reverence to honor the royal family. The performance of Jonson's *Masque of Queens* utilized the principal dance performance for such a function, using the torchbearers and dancers to form the letters of Prince Charles' name—James' eldest son and heir—as they moved (Scheilling 93-138). Such precision and calculated performances were staples of Jonson's masques, of which over twenty were composed during James' reign. The grandeur of presentation was one of many traditions within the masque genre, as was the employment of classical concepts, its imagery, and allusions (Scheilling 93-138). Mythological, allegorical, and historical figures are intertwined within the masque, often depicted as the most elaborate amongst the spectacle (Scheilling 93-138). The most popularly used figures originate from ancient Greece and Rome and are found in many works of the Renaissance. It has been viewed by some as an attempt to flatter, by placing the monarch amongst the highest deities of the Greek and Roman civilizations that were highly revered (Peacock 183-208). Deities from ancient mythology were popular in the masque genre and Jonson's *Hymenaei* follows this tradition, using Hymen, the Roman god of marriage as a key character. Although masques were not typically plot driven, they share an emphasis on the classical traditions with many forms of drama.

The masque was designed to be an entertaining episode in verse with mythological or allegorical characters (Scheilling 93-138). Dialogues were unimportant in the genre, as tableaux, music, and dance and elaborate scenery and costumes were the focus of the performances (Scheilling 93-138). Court masques

were typically only performed by members of the aristocracy disguised in fanciful costumes and surrounded by decadent scenery (Peacock 183-208). Little was expected of the courtiers except to appear stately and elegant; the success of the masque was dependent upon the architect, scene painter, decorator, ballet master and writer (Peacock 183-208). Since the expense of such a performance was so extensive, it was not conducive to public theatres. This kind of emphasis on status and wealth made the masque inaccessible to the general public.

Court performances offered a form of flattery to the elite of Elizabethan and Jacobean society, focusing on the decadence and tradition of court. Symbolically, the court masque was a testament to the power and majesty of a ruler, placing the king or queen as the focal point of the performance (Butler 22). The physical placement of the monarch acts similarly to the staging of a performance; the primary players of the performance—the monarch—are placed within view, thus highlighting their importance (Botonaki 72). This emphasis on the monarch's location plays upon the theatrical nature of the court performances; productions were played to the ruler and about the values of the ruler and expressed royal power both implicitly and explicitly to please and honor the monarch (Bevington and Holbrook 1-16). This concept has been met with scrutiny and contested by some scholarship that identifies critiques of the monarchy within masques. Although this may be possible, it is not a consistency seen in the court masque genre directly. Any

semblance of subversion may not necessarily be openly associated with the monarch, but perhaps events of the time. Social and political criticism can be found in many texts of the period, but the focus of their critique is often unclear. The presence of possible subversion in some examples does not warrant the generalization that all masques were veiled threats towards the shortcomings of the monarch.

To witness the performance of a court masque and the entire spectacle associated with it, one would have to be affiliated with the court or the entertainer involved. This issue of accessibility, however, became an entirely different matter when the masques were produced in print. Although commoners would be unable to witness the actual performance and were therefore not privy to the grand spectacle of the masques, the texts became semi-accessible to a wider audience upon publication.

As masques were designed to be the aesthetic embodiment of the decadence of court and the monarch's views, Shakespeare incorporated the grandeur and theatricality of royalty into many scenes within his works, creating an aspect of meta-theatricality, theatre about the theatre, or more appropriately, a performance circulating around the performance of court functions. The presentation of a masque could be determined by the physical relationship between the masquers, the King, and audience, as well as the placement of the stage, dancing area and auditorium, which were often specialized to the occasion (Butler 22). The authority

to enlist a performance either to be created or to come to court reinforced the authority of the monarch. The goal of any court performance was to praise the glory and honor of the monarch (Bevington and Holbrook 1-16). Although it has been disputed whether the masque was solely designed to encourage a monarch's values, few masques outwardly contradicted the monarch in a blatant fashion. Some, however, made insinuations that could perhaps be deemed condemning towards the monarchy. As a writer of court pieces, the complexity of creating such aspects within a work was to "transform" what could be perceived as the vanity and cowardice of a monarch into honor and chivalry, thus glorifying the image of the ruler without highlighting their inadequacies (Holbrook 72). During the rulings of Elizabeth and James, masques reached the pinnacle of their popularity and sparked the unique amalgams within Shakespeare's works. These printed texts would allow a loose familiarity with the style, if not the spectacle and scale of the genre. Even without knowledge of how the performances were executed, the texts offer a glimpse into the stylized lyrics and speeches that were at the masques core, traits that could easily be mimicked by other authors in their works.

Scholarship

Prior to the twentieth century, the Renaissance court masque attracted little attention from scholars and critics. Unlike other dramatic works of the period, masques were seen as less significant and for this reason were marginalized by

critics. According to Dr. Effie Botonak, the court masque was seen as a frivolous and insignificant by scholars prior to the twentieth century. Many early scholars believed that masques were strictly one-time performances and even at the time of their production they would only be performed twice on rare occasions and only on consecutive nights (Botonaki 68). Since it appeared that the performances were so rare, many scholars saw the genre as inconsequential; it is now believed that over one hundred masques were produced during the Stuart period, but because of the rarity of performance they have become lost, suggesting that the genre had more significance than originally believed (Botonaki 68). Early in the twentieth century critics began to explore the masque and traditional drama and ritual, bringing to light the intricate symbolism and mythological backgrounds found in the genre (Scheilling 93-138). During this time literary scholars like Enid Welsford and Allardyce Nicoll began exploring the origins of the genre discovering similarities with traditional folk dramas and prompting scholars to revisit the genre (Botonaki 68).

Scholars like Botonaki and Henry David Gray have explored the presence of the court masque predominantly in *The Tempest*, focusing on the inserted wedding masque as a source of reverence in honor of James. During the twentieth century, a great deal of scholarship on court masques has explored James influence on the genre, but only a few like Botonaki and Gray have made arguments regarding the inserted masque. Although both scholars approach the topics similarly, even though their works were separated by 80 years, their arguments together reveal the rarity

and latency of the discussion of inserted court masques amongst modern scholars.

It is believed that Shakespeare revised *The Tempest* for performance at the marriage of James' daughter to Frederick, the Elector Palatine, in 1613 (Bevington 218). According to Gray and Botonaki, the length of the work and the incorporation of the spectacle of a formal wedding masque suggested that modifications were made to accommodate the marriage celebration. The timing of both the betrothal of Princess Elizabeth and Shakespeare's creation of *The Tempest* have led these critics to believe that this event, along with the popularity of the masque at James' court inspired the play's incorporation of a masque. As part of the celebration, three masques and fourteen plays were performed at court (Botonaki 80). Much like James would commission performances, Shakespeare had Prospero commission the masque to celebrate his daughter's marriage in *The Tempest*. These striking similarities have caused Gray to support this theory of revision in *The Tempest*, suggesting to some that the masque-like quality was perhaps an afterthought.

Although these thoughts are compelling, little research has taken these concepts further, as we only have one surviving text of *The Tempest* and we cannot be certain Shakespeare revised it at all. It is very possible that Shakespeare, like many playwrights, may have revised his text following the original performances to better suit his venue. However, it is also likely that the revisions were made from notes and additions because of the performance of actors. This concept of revision does encourage the possibility that Shakespeare was mindful of his role during a

court performance. Shakespeare had little contact with the court of Elizabeth and that can be seen in his approach and depiction of court figures; during James' rule, he was much more involved as a court performer and as such would have been more in tune with the monarch's taste and appeasing them.

The masque and social commentary in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The final act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* brings the characters to the wedding celebration of Theseus, the duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, the legendary queen of the Amazons. It is here that the duke must select a performance to honor the occasion. Despite being urged to select a different performance, because "it is nothing, nothing in the world/unless [he] can find sport in their intent," Theseus chooses the mechanicals to perform, bringing Bottom and his fellow craftsmen to the stage (5.1.9). Although, this line is not stated by Theseus, but Egeus who is not a monarch, it is Theseus' response that warrants noting in the depiction of male monarchs in the text. He states that it is "The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing/Our sport shall be to take what they mistake," implying that they will poke fun at the simple nature of the mechanicals because they are nobility and far more educated than the craftsmen (5.1.95-96). This exchange establishes a clear sense of entitlement from Theseus as a male authority figure.

With the creation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare briefly acknowledges the conventions of the court masque, but also offers a social

commentary on the hierarchy of the wealthy. Unlike *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not much like a masque in performance, spectacle, or conventions, but it does subvert many of the traditions. One of the staples of a court masque was that it was to be performed for monarchs by courtiers and aristocrats, not the commoners. Shakespeare takes this concept and twists it within Act 5 scene 1 and the performance of Pyramus and Thisbee. Although courtiers were intended to perform court masques, Shakespeare incorporates common, working class men performing at a palace for the monarch. This blatant manipulation of tradition seems to mock the overly elaborate and decadent presentations at court. Typically court performances were intended to be opulent and expensive; this kind of self-indulgence is completely subverted by the performance of Pyramus and Thisbee, which is contradictory to the typical aesthetic of court performances. Instead of the grand spectacle of most masques, Shakespeare produces a masque for "the common man," creating a low brow, accessible variation of a masque presented by working class men. In this brief performance, Shakespeare breaks down the ideas of the masque and creates a satire of everything it stood for at court. Unlike most court performances that honor and cater to monarchs, Shakespeare's representation of courtly extravagance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* depicts an affront to the traditions of the monarchy.

Though it would seem that the satire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is merely playful or meant in jest, certain aspects depict a much more incongruous nature. Although Shakespeare does not appear to outwardly critique courtiers or

the monarchy, he offers subtle satire. Theseus and members of his court poke fun at Bottom and his troupe, calling them “hard-handed men that work in Athens here. /Which never laboured in their minds til now,” as if they are lowly and uneducated by comparison (5.1.75-76). Shakespeare takes these comments and depicts the courtiers as egotistical and arrogant. As they poke fun at the simple and uneducated performers, they represent courtiers as unseemly and pompous. By placing a mock masque as the wedding performance in the text, Shakespeare does not follow the traditional aim of authors to honor the monarch; instead of paying reverence to monarchs, he depicts their pageantry as pomp and circumstance. The act of subverting the aesthetics of the court masque further degrades the glamour of the court, conveying the overindulgence that purveys the monarchy.

Unlike the elaborate decadence of court masques, the performance of Pyramus and Thisbee subverts all of the aesthetic ideals of the masque. The subject of the performance is inappropriate—a tragedy for a marriage celebration—, yet Shakespeare toys with the linguistics and semantic mistakes, exaggerating the farce of the royal spectacle. The courtiers believe that they will be humored by the commoners, “[giving] them thanks for nothing/[their] sport shall be to take what they mistake:/And what poor duty can do, noble respect/Takes in might, not merit,” making the courtiers feel even more stately for lowering themselves to such a level (5.1.13). Using Bottom as a fool figure, typically found in Elizabethan comedies, Shakespeare turns the tables on how monarchs are viewed, taking them from power to criticism. His self-aggrandizing confidence, leads him to believe that everyone

takes him as seriously as he does himself.

The unpolished style of the performance deviates from every concept of the court, making it more stylized after performances for the masses. Taking working class men and placing them as performers, serves as a critique of the elitist nature of court performances. Only courtiers and accomplished performers would grace the stage at court, especially for a marriage celebration. Despite the foolish nature of the players, Shakespeare critiques the snobbish behavior of courtiers towards the lower class and foolishness of court celebration. Using the character of Bottom as a jester sort—naïve and instinctive, the outsider of the plot—Shakespeare places him in the best position to express truth.

By placing Bottom in this position, Shakespeare establishes a way to satirize court life without consequence. The rudimentary production of Pyramus and Thisbee destabilizes every aesthetic ideal of a masque, except portions of the content. Nature and speech are still demonstrated, but all the prestige and reverence to monarchical traditions has been removed, thus undermining the traditions of court celebrations. The subtlety of separation from traditions removes the superiority of the courtiers. Removing the finery and grandeur of performance and still presenting an effectively entertaining performance, mocks the overly elaborate spectacle of the court.

Although many of Shakespeare's later works rely on the idea of spectacle, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies more on comedic wit and banter than elaborate

displays. In this early representation of a masque within his work, Shakespeare is rather irreverent to the tradition, satirizing its social and monarchical purposes. His references to the masque genre are small and isolated throughout the text. The character of Ariel plays into the spectacle: “[vanishing] in thunder; then, to soft music, enter the Shapes again, and dance, with mocks and mows, and carrying out the table” (3.3.84-85). This description exemplifies music and dance of the masque. Although he does model the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe after the masque genre and utilizes many of its components, he does not ever fully embrace the idea of honoring the monarch. Instead he contradicts the values that masques were intended to convey, choosing instead to write in a lowbrow comedic performance at the marriage celebration of the highest status. Since masques were designed to embody the grandeur and power of the monarch’s authority, it is a unique statement to contradict these ideals in a text as Shakespeare does.

The authority of the monarch in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is consistently undermined within the work. There are few demonstrations of monarchical power in the text that would depict the monarchy in a positive light. Throughout the text, monarchs are depicted as rather ignorant and oblivious to what occurs around them, thus allowing mayhem and mischief to ensue. Even within the fairy world, the monarchical figures of Titania and Oberon are made into a mockery. Throughout the text the bickering and jealousy of these two figures results in conniving and manipulation. These “forgeries of jealousy” depict inept rulers who use those around them as pawns, thinking of little but themselves (2.1.450). Through much of

the text, these ethereal beings bicker, but it is Oberon who meddles and plots. Oberon is a fickle character, whose desires must be appeased for him to be happy. When Titania refuses Oberon's request for the possession of her boy, he cannot abide losing. He plots to "make her render up her page to [him]," but not before having fun at her expense, planning to place her under a spell (1.2.170).

Despite the less than esteemed representation of royalty and court performances, Shakespeare does employ some of the common aspects of the masque. Although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not employ the element of nature as traditionally as *The Tempest* does, Shakespeare still offers slight references to the spectacle of the genre. As with most masques, Shakespeare uses mythological beings, auditory effects and verse within the text to acknowledge the traditions. The element most similar to traditional court masques is the fairies. Many of the court masques of the period used fairies as one of the mythical beings (Scheilling 93-138).

Typically, masques emphasized nature as part of the spectacle, often making the mythological characters deities of nature. Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* incorporated nature thoroughly both with the characters and the spectacle of the works. Much like the opening scene of *The Tempest*, the *Masque of Blackness* opens with a stormy sea filled with six blue-haired merman-like tritons. The gods Oceanus and Niger entered, mounted upon giant seahorses followed shortly after by the twelve daughters of Niger and the twelve nymphs of Oceanus riding in hollow seashell. Shakespeare pays homage to that idea by incorporating the characters of

the faery world, acknowledging the tradition, but never fully embraces it as a true masque.

Nature's presence in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is much more generalized than many of the traditional masques. Despite its continuous presence and driving force for a portion of the plot, it does not necessarily add to the spectacle of the work. In many Renaissance masques, nature was utilized to adhere to a classical aesthetic and add to the grandeur of the performances, but this is not the case with Shakespeare's play. Within his work, nature becomes a driving force of the text and a means to purvey the mischievous doings of the fairy folk with ease. At this point in his career, the spectacle of the masque had not fully developed within his work, but the incorporation of nature lent itself to a masque-like spectacle.

By comparison to the works of some of the popular writers of the time, like Ben Jonson, whose works were comprised of spectacle and elaborate presentations, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is rather tame. Despite the use of masque elements, the play does not depend upon the same need for decadence that the staging a masque entails. The subtleties of the references to the masque style are the only traditional concepts that are found within this Elizabethan period work from Shakespeare. Within his later works, the presence of masque-like features emphasize the style and decadence of the genre, promoting a more reverential and traditional representation of the masque.

The Tempest and the masque

The accession of the Stuarts to power brought the court masque new importance. James I and his wife, Anne, were willing to spare no expense on the production and creation of court performances (Barroll 121-136). Though previous monarchs had fueled the court masque's development, their interest in the genre allowed it to reach its potential. Evidence suggests that James favored masques and it was this interest that gave birth to the concept of the antimasque, which presented ugly or comic figures and were designed to subvert the ideas and grandeur of the masque (Craig 176-193). Anne was devoted to court entertainments, spending extravagantly on the production of masques, including Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*, in which she performed (Botanak 67-70). As masques were favored at court by both James and Anne, it is extremely curious that Shakespeare never wrote a "true" masque; instead Shakespeare toyed with the concept in *The Tempest*, creating something that reimagined the concepts of theatre and gave the court masque new life.

Unlike the rare element of spectacle in his early works, Shakespeare's later work is riddled with grand and elaborate staging ideas that appear to have heightened under James' rule. More than just the spectacle, in this work Shakespeare adhered closely to the masque traditions in most ways. There is a kind of reverence in *The Tempest* that was lacking in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, emphasizing the tradition of the court masque.

The representation of male monarchical characters deviates from the aim of a court masque to lift the monarch to the highest place of esteem; instead of following this tradition, Shakespeare attempts to critique and humble the authority of male monarchical rule. The kind of deliberate criticism was found in his early work, but the presence of the masque style in his later work adheres to the traditions with a kind of reverence for monarchical figures.

Monarchical authority and power are represented in a more respectful and elaborate fashion. Instead of depicting oblivious and ignorant ruling, Shakespeare plays up the idea of power and ultimate control within the text. Throughout the work, Prospero exerts his power on everyone and everything around him, forging an undeniable authority that pays homage to James. The servitude of Ariel and Caliban is a key example of his authority over the natives, giving them orders to aid him in his revenge: "Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour/Lies at my mercy all /mine enemies./ Shortly shall my labors end, and thou/Shalt have the air at /freedom. For a little/Follow and do me service" (4.1.291-295). Throughout the text, Prospero uses visual aural illusions to manipulate those around him and expose their true nature.

Prospero's magic places him in total control, at times making him appear almost omniscient and in command of what will happen, beliefs that were common regarding the god given power of the monarch. This contradiction of magical power versus divine right establishes a unique disparity of how monarchical power is

displayed. Prospero implies that life is an illusion of freedom that dispenses at death and that he has seen into this future: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-158). This statement suggests that freedom is deception, perhaps because he believes the monarch is ultimately in control. By asserting power, by any means necessary, otherworldly or otherwise, it implies adherence to the tradition of honoring the monarch.

There is a noteworthy disparity in the presentation of female monarchs versus male monarchs in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. In Shakespeare's early work, both female embodiments of monarchs—Titania and Hippolyta—are not depicted as fickle or cruel and do not seem to be critiqued. Alternatively, Shakespeare's male monarchs—Oberon, Theseus, and Prospero—are depicted as power hungry and eager to achieve their own desires at the expense of others. All three male representations of rulers use their female counterparts to suit their own agendas. Prospero rarely allows his daughter to speak, Oberon plots to take Titania's page, and Theseus dominates Hippolyta reminding her that "[he] wooed thee with [his] sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries" (1.1.2).

By this point in his career, Shakespeare's conceptualization of the masque genre is more traditional, paying respect to its spectacle. *The Tempest* follows this tradition of paying respect to the monarchy, offering subtle references to the practices of court. Instead of the satirized and critical nature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* is constructed as a more reverential text, honoring the

idea of the authority and power of the monarch. Since Shakespeare was much more active in James' court, his conception of the purpose and function of masques is much more developed and traditional.

The Tempest incorporated the decadence and key conventions of a court masque further in the brief wedding masque of Act IV. The integration of the wedding masque in the text directly incorporates a fragment of a masque into the play, thus adding to the spectacle. Essentially, the events of the entire play are nature driven much like traditional masques, but are guided by the power of Prospero, which pays homage to the power of the monarch. The events of the play begin after a storm strands the characters upon the island, this direct effect of nature on the text is common among court masques. Although Shakespeare does not fixate on spectacle in the same manner as masques typically do, he established a balance between theatrical conventions and extravagant masque spectacle, hence the presence of the wedding masque in Act IV. Nature, however, is used to circulate through the entire text, harnessing one of the most traditional components of the masque and effectively using it to be both subtle and direct references to the masque genre. Throughout the text, details reference the sights and sounds of nature, offering brief glimpses of the masque tradition. Not only do the lines reference examples of nature, but so do the stage directions, noting that "Thunder and lightning" precede Ariel's entrance and exit at several points of the play (3.3.52).

Most, if not all, of the passages in *The Tempest* reference some aspect of nature—water, winds, fire, hills, sea—many of which are used as auditory effects as well. In *The Tempest*, an act of nature—the storm—acts as the catalyst to the action of the play. Within the opening scene of Act 1, the stage is set with “A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning,” which establishes both the auditory effect and nature elements that masques conveyed. What makes the use of nature so unique within Shakespeare’s text is that he does not merely use nature as one component and sound as another; he makes them one. This stage direction utilizes the sounds of nature as an auditory effect in order to convey the environment cleverly.

By using nature in this manner, the play allows the idea to subtly permeate through the text beyond what the lines state. The third scene of Act 3 is able to do this as well, blending sound and text to convey that “The winds did sing” without incorporating an actual effect (3.3.97). Even when the brief line depicts nature, the auditory component is acknowledged and it is able to tie in both elements to convey the idea of sound, thus adding to the spectacle. By incorporating references and auditory effects to convey nature in the text, Shakespeare plays on the style and spectacle of the masque and its popular elements.

Conscious references to nature permeate the text. Each detail is given in a subtle manner that recalls the event that has brought the characters to their fate. This combination of text and sound is an act of collaboration between two ideas, demonstrating the concept of nature on two levels: verbally through text and the

auditory effects. The restructuring of this masque-like element, blends these traditions into the play text format. In a sense, Shakespeare is able to break down the essence of the masque tradition and employ it within his own style. This act furthers the adaptation of ideas and styles found within *The Tempest*. Spectacle has a much stronger presence within the text and blends with the nature elements. Throughout the text, the masque-like components are much more traditional, effectively working to develop the spectacle of the play.

Similar references are made in most masques of the time, including Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*, which preceded *The Tempest* by six years and was arguably one of the most popular masques. Although *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Tempest* use similar aspects of nature, stylistically speaking, they differ in their incorporation of the ideas. *The Masque of Blackness* remains true to the masque genre and incorporates the key elements of the style. However, Shakespeare incorporates the conventions of the masque and toys with the antimasque, but reimagines their applications, fusing them into his play text. The antimasque developed during James' reign and incorporated more gruesome and unattractive elements to counter the spectacle of the performances. Shakespeare toys with this convention by adding the character of Caliban, the native slave of Prospero, to serve as a contradiction to the spectacle. Caliban's grotesqueness contradicts the elegant masque like spectacle, acting as "A freckled whelp hag-born—not honored with/A human shape" (1.2.287-288). His monstrous form opposes the aesthetic of glamour, melding with the more subtle elements of the masque and Shakespeare's signature

elements to create a unique entity within his works.

Imitation and reimagination in the Renaissance

By building on the foundation established by his predecessors— both playwrights and performers—Shakespeare continues the idea of evolution and collaboration in theatre. Shakespeare incorporates the masque genre into his own style; he capitalizes on its popularity by blending two genres to create something new. When *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* plays off of the conventions of other playwrights, Shakespeare engages in a form of collaboration. This idea of reinterpretation is the source of many concepts within theatre, which in a sense becomes a kind of collaboration.

If we view Renaissance theatre as a venue for reinterpretation and imitation of concepts and ideas that have been recycled, meaning that artists “borrowed” or used the ideas of their predecessors and colleagues in their works, then we must reevaluate our definition of authorship. The issue of Shakespeare’s authorship has been the source of continuous debate. But if we understand the spirit of theatrical collaboration during the Renaissance and the ways Shakespeare reinterpreted the ideas of others, we might remove some of the stigma associated with that issue.

In other words, authorship in the Renaissance did not maintain the same strict guidelines as modern composition. Modern views of authorship encourage

that the individual(s) that receive credit are the sole authors of a work; based on the evolution of theatre in the Renaissance, however, this standard does not apply. The elements that imitate those found in masques are distinct within *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Connections between the masque genre and Shakespeare's text reinterpret and adapt these elements, creating a new style within plays.

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